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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 001927

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CACEN, DRL
NSC FOR DAVID MERKEL
USMISSION OSCE FOR KIT TRAUB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/01/2015
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [AM](#)
SUBJECT: LOCAL ELECTIONS END WITH ALLEGATIONS OF CONTINUED
VIOLATIONS

REF: A) YEREVAN 1790 B) YEREVAN 1731

Classified By: A/DCM Robin Phillips for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

SUMMARY

[¶1.](#) (C) Armenian local elections -- held September 18 through October 23 -- met international standards, Central Electoral Commission Head Garegin Azaryan told reporters during an October 28 press conference. Local election monitors, however, disputed Azaryan's claim and alleged "widespread violations" that included voter list inaccuracies, police interference, ballot box stuffing, illegal campaigning, and abuse of proxy rights. Council of Europe (CoE) Special Representative Bojana Urumova previewed a November 9 report that she told us would support domestic monitors' claims of "widespread violations." End Summary.

ELECTIONS OFFICIAL: ELECTIONS MET INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

[¶2.](#) (C) Central Electoral Commission (CEC) Head Garegin Azaryan, told reporters at an October 28 CEC press conference that Armenian local elections -- held September 18 through October 23 -- met international standards. (Note: Azaryan is one of few GOAM officials to publicly endorse the local elections as "free and fair." End Note.) Azaryan quoted Council of Europe (CoE) monitoring team leader Sean O'Brien, who told reporters during an October 17 press conference that the local elections were "generally consistent with the Council of Europe's electoral standards." (Note: On October 31, CoE Special Representative Bojana Urumova told us that a full CoE report on the local elections -- scheduled for release on November 9 -- would contradict O'Brien's assessment, and be much closer to the generally negative evaluations of domestic observers. "O'Brien's comments were unfortunate," Urumova told us.)

ELECTIONS FAILED TO MEET INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

[¶3.](#) (C) Armenian NGO "It's Your Choice" (funded by the National Democratic Institute and the British Embassy and generally linked to the government's detractors) released weekly reports throughout the election period documenting "widespread violations and voter list inaccuracies." IYC Executive Director Harut Humbartsumyan told us that, in each of the local elections, monitors observed election commission officials turning voters away from the polls after their names "inexplicably vanished" from previous versions of the voters registration lists. IYC's reports also recorded specific incidents of police interference, ballot box stuffing, illegal campaigning, and abuse of proxy rights. "The elections were nowhere near international standards," Humbartsumyan said. Humbartsumyan told us IYC plans to release a full report in early November.

POLICE, NOT ELECTIONS COMMISSION, NOW REGISTERING VOTERS

[¶4.](#) (C) Effective June 8, Armenia's revised election code transferred responsibility for local voter registration to the National Police Passport and Visa Department. "The police," according to Humbartsumyan, "have obviously failed." Humbartsumyan complained that police in many precincts supplied the final version of voters lists (which IYC claimed contained many inaccuracies) only hours, and sometimes minutes, before the polls opened. "Disenfranchised voters" who could not find their names on the list, according to Humbartsumyan, rarely sought redress in court or other polling stations.

COMMENT: FLAWED LOCAL ELECTIONS A TASTE OF THINGS TO COME?

15. (C) As a test case for the November 27 referendum on the Council of Europe-approved package of constitutional amendments (reftels), the Armenian elections establishment failed to live up to expectations. IYC's reports echo news stories of widespread elections violations and raise serious concerns about the GOAM's ability to administer a referendum that the public will accept as free and fair. On October 27, the Ambassador announced a package of USG democracy assistance programs focused on the upcoming 2007 and 2008 elections. None of these programs, however, is intended to change the environment before the referendum on November 27.
EVANS